

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

No. 1007, NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17, 1888.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

## "A LEAL LASS."

BY RICHARD ASHE KING.

### CHAPTER XI. "MISS HICK."

DAY after day passed, and nothing more was heard from Fred, to his father's great uneasiness; which, however, he contrived to disguise, not only from his guest, but from his wife and daughter. Why suggest to them a trouble that might never come? If it never came, they would have been troubled for nothing; and, if it did come, they would have been troubled too soon.

Wherefore the Vicar made light of Fred's unaccountable absence and silence, except in his apologies to his guest, and then politeness required him to make much of them.

Gower, however, was much more than resigned to his friend's absence, since to it he owed hours of May's intoxicating companionship. By this time, the too susceptible youth was so hopelessly in love that he waited only for a little more courage and a little more encouragement to propose. That he had received already a great deal of encouragement he had no doubt at all. Though shy, he was very far from being modest, and he therefore found most encouragement in what should have most discouraged him—May's frank fellowship. If he had had any adequate idea of modesty—not to say of May—he would have known that her free and open manner; her jests, verbal or practical; her readiness to accompany him everywhere, and her eagerness to please him in everything, were the most certain signs of her absolute indifference to him. But, judging her as he might justly have judged Pattie Pratt, he read all these signs the other way.

Besides, the idea of his own social importance, which the anticipation of his father's immediate death had helped him to realise so vividly, was in itself as great an encouragement to him as May's winsome manner. Did it not account in some part for that manner? Would she have shown herself so winning at once—from the very first day of his visit—to one of less social importance? No doubt she liked him now for himself; but her cordiality, before she had known him, could have been shown only to the son and heir of Sir George Gower.

Like Slender, who, in his suit to Mistress Anne Page, did not forget, or allow others to forget, his relationship to Shallow—"a Justice of the Peace in his country, simple though I stand here"—Gower was not unmindful for a moment of the great start in the race which his prospects as his father's son and heir gave him.

On the whole, then, what between his love-lornness, his sense of self-importance, and his construction of May's free friendliness, our shy and susceptible wooer needed but a slight impulse to push him over the brink of a proposal.

But of this May, in spite of Con's caution, had little real apprehension. Of course, she saw that he admired her; but so did Mr. Spratt; and a proposal from Mr. Spratt would have seemed to her less unprovoked than one from Mr. Gower. The fact was, she made the natural, but serious mistake, of supposing that Gower estimated himself at her light valuation; which, if different, was not higher than her valuation of Mr. Spratt. And she could not see that she had given either gentleman any encouragement, since her sprightly, frank, and pleasant manner was as natural to her as her breathing, and was no more

emphasized for Mr. Gower or Mr. Spratt than it was for Mrs. Sugden or Miss Brice. If she had grown more, instead of less, reserved upon acquaintance, Mr. Gower might have had ground for encouragement; but such a girl as May was the last in the world to wear her heart upon her sleeve in the sight of the man who had won it.

While things were in this critical state, May received the following letter from an eccentric old maid in the village, Miss Hick.

"MY DEAR MAY,—You have given me up altogether of late for 'a very good reason!' Do you think you could tear yourself away for an hour? It's not Miss Brice, though I do think something ought to be done; but there's no use speaking to your father even if he *could* stop him marrying any one he pleases, and even the Bishop couldn't, I suppose; but it's a *very great scandal*. However, it's not *my* business, and it's about something else I want to see you—something *very important*, that I can speak only to *you* about. You will come at once, I know, whether he can spare you or not! Yours very affectionately,

"MARTHA HICK."

"Any news, dear?" asked her father at sight of May's perplexed face after she had read this letter.

"No, father; it's only from Miss Hick asking me to call," she said, handing the letter to her father.

"I don't know how you can say there's no news in it, when she tells you that scandal is not her business, as if she had any other business under the sun!" cried the Vicar impatiently. "I suppose it's Spratt, though the poor little man has hardly yet recovered from her marriage of him to Miss Walmsley."

"It must be Mr. Spratt," May replied, after another look at the letter.

"That woman is a perfect mischief mill," broke out the Vicar, in his rage at the suggestion in the letter that May had metal more attractive—obviously Gower—to keep her at home. "That woman is a perfect mischief mill. Out of a few slender threads of fact she spins yards of the most scandalous fictions. But she has a curious history, which, perhaps, explains or excuses her delight in scandal." He then proceeded to inform his guest that Miss Hick had had a disappointment in love at the mature age of thirty-five, when such disappointments, like the measles, are less easily got over. A Mr. Skipwith, a Curate of his immediate

predecessor, had won her too susceptible heart—intentionally as she believed; but innocently and unconsciously, as he protested. To give him an excuse for frequent calls upon her she had feigned an illness, which prevented her attendance at church, and demanded his attendance at her home for the ministrations of the consolations of religion to her. In those days she was the main support of all the Parochial Societies and Charities, and, indeed, of Mr. Skipwith himself, half of whose stipend she paid, and half or more than half of whose board she furnished. She sent him presents almost daily of all kinds of provisions, especially those of a substantial kind. In return for this generosity, Mr. Skipwith was constant in his attendance upon her; interchanging his spiritual for her temporal advice. For, in all his difficulties with his Vicar, his work, and his parishioners—and he contrived to have some on hand always—he had recourse for advice to this elderly Egeria. In truth, though she was but ten years his senior, he regarded her so much more as a mother than as a possible wife, that he confided to her his engagement to Miss Wade, the daughter and heiress of a retired wine merchant! Miss Hick forthwith went into hysterics, and, upon coming out of them, dismissed Mr. Skipwith, not only from her house, but from his curacy; for she at once withdrew her grant in aid of his stipend.

Henceforth, she held in unceasingly and unappeasable detestation—not the clergy in general—but only Curates; as though Curates differed as essentially from Rectors, as grubs from butterflies.

The furious and foolish disturbance she had made about the matter in the first frenzy of her disappointment was bitterly regretted when, upon coming more to herself, she found herself the laughing-stock of the parish. This shame kept her still indoors under the same pretext of illhealth, until, from habit and from indolence, she grew to hate the idea of going abroad.

Nevertheless, if the mountain would not stir, Mahomet might come to it; if she would not visit the parish, the parish should visit her. She contrived to make herself indispensable in one way or another to so many people, that she had a crowd of visitors with whom she did a large business in gossip. As a merchant or middleman she stayed at home, while the rest came and went, imparting gossip and supporting it when manufactured into scandal. In fact, all the foul linen of

the parish was brought to her house, and often got mixed in her mind—even as foul linen gets mixed sometimes at the laundress—and was sometimes mis-sent to the wrong address.

"Fortunately she has become such a proverb for canards that no one believes her."

"She can't really mean to make mischief, for she's very kind-hearted," urged May.

"To herself," retorted the Vicar, still angry. "She scatters scandal and money from just the same motive, self-gratification; and, because she's thinking only of herself, she often does as much mischief with her money as with her tongue."

"Oh, but she's unselfishly kind-hearted, too; she is indeed," May pleaded, remembering many acts of kindness kindly done by Miss Hick to herself.

"Well, perhaps she is," her father admitted with reluctant justice. "But she does ten times more evil with her tongue than she does good with her hand. I wonder what mare's nest she has found now for you?"

"I have no idea," May replied, though, as she spoke, a sudden misgiving that it might somehow be something about Fred crossed her mind; but then she was now always dreading to hear ill news of Fred. Fearing that her father also might suspect this—of which there was not, of course, the remotest danger—she turned suddenly to say to Gower:

"You must go to see her."

"I? Why should I go?"

"Oh, because everyone goes; and it's the only pleasure the poor old soul has."

"Seeing me?"

"She has not come quite to that yet; but she may when she knows you, she's so odd," May answered laughing.

"I will go with pleasure if you will be so good as to take me," Gower answered eagerly.

May shook her head decidedly.

"She wants to see me alone; but father can take you."

Her father, however, remembering what May had overlooked—that Miss Hick would be sure to chaff Gower about her—said significantly:

"She would only talk like that letter to him—all kinds of rubbishy gossip."

May, understanding the allusion, coloured, and turned to busy herself with Kathleen, while her father changed the conversation.

May lost no time in hurrying off to see the old lady, having still a disquieting pre-

sentiment that it was of Fred she was going to hear, though it was hard to imagine how Miss Hick—with whom Fred was no favourite—could hear about him anything that neither his father, his friend, nor herself had heard.

Miss Hick had lived in the bow-window of one of the many large rooms of Hemmersley Lodge for over a quarter of a century, under the pretext—in which she had long come herself to believe—that she was a chronic invalid. She did not look it, certainly, for she was a fat, sleek, rosy little woman, who always reminded you somehow, by her plump figure, her little turned-up nose, and her restless and twinkling eyes, of a podgy little pig who grunts up at you expectantly when you stoop to look at him over the sty-wall.

"Well, my dear, you've come at last; but, of course, I understand; don't apologise," she cried in one breath, nodding and smiling.

"I couldn't get away from Mr. Gower, if you mean that, Miss Hick," May answered, with such absolute and unconcerned coolness as upset altogether, for the moment, that good lady's little romance. "He's too fascinating—too, too," she added, nodding emphatically.

"Oh, but, now, really?" gasped Miss Hick, utterly defeated by May's audacious tactics.

"Yes, really; just wait till you see him for yourself."

"He was engaged already!" cried the old lady triumphantly, after a pause of profound perplexity over this riddle.

"How did you know, Miss Hick?"

"Because, if he hadn't been, he couldn't have resisted you, my dear."

"But how did you know he had refused me?"

"Now do be serious, May. Who is she?" she asked with life-and-death earnestness, though she knew nothing of Gower but his name.

"That he's engaged to? But I didn't know even that he was engaged till you told me, Miss Hick."

"I! Why you told me yourself this moment that he was engaged!"

Having tried earnestly, yet all to no purpose, to get this idea out of Miss Hick's head, May changed the subject.

"But you wanted to see me, Miss Hick?"

"I wanted to know about Fred, my dear. What is it now?"

"What is it?"

"My dear, I know all about it; so there's no need to make a mystery of it to me."

"What have you heard, Miss Hick? Do tell me," cried May, with agitated eagerness.

"I have heard from himself!" Miss Hick rejoined triumphantly. "If he confides in me, you may, I think."

"But I really know nothing at all about him, Miss Hick. He has not written to me since he went to London. What is the matter? Do pray tell me."

But, as Miss Hick had really nothing to tell—for she had been playing merely a game of brag—she turned upon a sudden, compunctious and discreet.

"As he has not written to you, I don't think he would wish me to speak about it, even to you, my dear. Indeed, he asked me to say nothing of it to anyone; but I thought that he must, of course, have told you."

"He has written to ask you to lend him some money; but I knew he wanted some," May answered, now absolutely certain that there was nothing else in the letter; for, otherwise, Miss Hick could not possibly have contained herself. Besides, as Fred would as soon have chosen the local paper as Miss Hick for a confidant, plainly nothing but the direst pecuniary necessity could have driven him to apply to her.

"But what for, my dear? What for? That is the question."

"Has he told you?"

"He couldn't tell either you or me, my dear, in so many words, you know," Miss Hick replied.

"Then he has only asked you for a loan?" persisted May, mercilessly.

"Because he couldn't tell me or even you, my dear, what it was for. Depend upon it he has got entangled with some girl, and he's trying to buy her off. Breach of promise, you know, or something of that sort," she added, mindful of May's maiden innocence.

"It isn't that at all, Miss Hick; it isn't, indeed," May urged, foreseeing the immense amount of mischief the scandalous old soul might make of her own mere imaginings. "He has got into debt by retuning the entertainments of his friends. He told me so himself."

"Oh well, my dear, it is not my business."

"You can't help him?" faltered May distressfully.

"I don't think I could, conscientiously, dear, without knowing what the money was for."

"He will tell you, I know he will, if—if you'll promise not to mention it," May cried eagerly.

"But he says he must have it by return of post to be of any use to him. There wouldn't be time to hear; and that's why I sent for you, dear, to ask you about it."

"Do pray send it to him, Miss Hick; pray do. He may be in some great trouble."

"You will be in great trouble if I don't, I see, my dear; and so it's done," said the old lady, nodding very kindly at May, whom she loved probably better than any one else in the world.

May started up and kissed her effusively, and then Miss Hick sent her for pen, ink, paper, and cheque-book, to get the business done out of hand and off the girl's mind.

"And, Miss Hick," said May rising when the letter had been given her to post, "you won't talk about it, I know."

"Of course not, dear; but you mustn't go, I haven't had a word with you yet. No, no, you sha'n't go indeed. You must sit down and tell me everything."

"I really don't think I have anything new to tell you," May said as she re-seated herself, "except that Mr. Sugden has given us the field."

"He must be going to die, or break, then. He'll never go through the eye of a needle."

May laughed at this apt application of Scripture to Mr. Sugden's camel-like bulk.

"I have always found him very generous," she protested.

"To you, my dear; he can't resist a pretty face. Perhaps it would be as well if he could," she added, with a significant shake of the head.

"It will be a great improvement to the school."

"And a great convenience to Miss Brice and Mr. Spratt, my dear. Much more convenient than Brick Lane."

"How do you mean?"

"My dear, they're always together in Brick Lane."

"Mr. Spratt and Miss Brice!" exclaimed May, laughing in spite of herself, at such a Strephon and Urania, and at the Arcadian rendezvous of Brick Lane.

"Ask Dalby, the butcher's boy, if you don't believe me, my dear; he saw them walking together there last Saturday," cried Miss Hick triumphantly.

"Yes?"

"Now, May dear, you know just as well as I do that he's paying her attention."



"You don't know Mr. Spratt. He wouldn't stoop to pay attention to anything but a black-beetle. And, as for Miss Brice, she's engaged already—to Canon Barfield's Scripture-reader, Mr. Judd."

"It's quite time, then, she told Mr. Spratt of it."

"But Mr. Spratt is to help to marry them next month."

"Then it's time Mr. Judd was told of his attentions."

"But I assure you, Miss Hick," protested May earnestly, "Mr. Spratt hasn't any attentions. He never had any; he was born without them; he was indeed."

"Ah, my dear, you don't know them," "them" meaning the male sex generally, but Curates in particular—"of course he'd tell you that he was only collecting black-beetles with her; though, why he should choose her to collect them with him in Brick Lane——"

"Oh, but he didn't tell me anything of the kind."

"My dear, you said this moment that he was not paying attentions to her, but collecting black-beetles with her in Brick Lane."

"I only said his mind was too full of black-beetles to pay attention to her, or any one."

This description of Mr. Spratt's mind, as swarming, like a cellar kitchen in a seaport town with black-beetles, did not at all reassure Miss Hick.

"I don't think that's any excuse, my dear," rejoined the old lady with exasperating irrelevance, "he may not have very nice tastes, but he ought to remember his position as a clergyman. Of course I know Miss Brice is a great pet of yours; but she's not a lady, and that makes it all the worse if he means nothing, as you say; and if she's engaged to—to—— Who did you say she was engaged to?"

"Canon Barfield's Scripture-reader, Mr. Judd."

"He wears a soft hat, and a long coat, and a red beard, and walks as if he were in a sick room!" cried Miss Hick, with almost breathless eagerness.

"And long hair, and an umbrella, and dark-grey trousers with two sets of knees to them, and eyes with all the colour washed out, perhaps from his chronic cold in the head. That's him!" cried May, laughing at the old lady's ravenous eagerness to identify a Leeds Scripture-reader.

"So she's engaged to him, is she? A Scripture-reader! Ah! my dear, you

never find a man take to the trade of religion that's fit for any other trade—never."

"Clergymen?" asked May, assured of putting the old lady to confusion.

But she was not put to confusion at all.

"There are not many clergymen like your father, my dear. Look at the Curates! Is there one of them who would have got into any other profession? And it's the same with Scripture-readers among the lower classes; it's only those that are fit for nothing else that take to it."

May was amazed by Miss Hick's views on this subject, being as clear, decided, and pointedly expressed as they were caustic. But Miss Hick, having brooded for so many years upon her bitter grudge against the Church, had not only formed, but formulated almost epigrammatically in her mind, her disparaging views of the clergy.

"My dear, I hope you won't marry a clergyman till you meet one like your father. This Mr. Gower isn't going to be one, is he?"

May laughed at the suggestion of so preposterous idea.

"You've almost persuaded me that he is."

"I, my dear!"

"As you say, it's only those that are fit for nothing who take to it! I don't think he's going to be anything but his father's son, which is as easy a profession as even the Church."

Then Miss Hick made greedy enquiry into Sir George Gower's birth, position, income, number of family, and so on, and could hardly be persuaded that May knew little more than herself about them.

"It may come off yet, my dear; he's too young to know his own mind," she said at length with a knowing nod and smile, alluding to the possibility of Gower's jilting his fiancée in May's favour.

"He certainly doesn't know it as well as you do, Miss Hick," May rejoined laughing.

## UNPROFESSIONAL CRITICISMS.

In looking through the contents of the Free Library of a large manufacturing town, we have often been as much diverted by the pencil annotations in the margins as by the matter of the volumes themselves. These marginal notes are expressions of mind, mood, or character. They are the legacy of early readers to their successors; and we have again and again been tempted into reverie, the better to realise

the persons and idiosyncracies of these our predecessors. Experience has taught us that love-passages the most invite underlining and comment. When, therefore, we open one of Trollope's novels, we prepare for a double treat. Girls and boys take up the black-lead cudgel on behalf of human nature, and approve or disapprove of the love conversations and narrative with a freedom and assurance which can only come from an innate sense of knowledge and propriety in affairs of the heart. Their "Ohs," and "Very trues," and "Capitals!" and "Boshes!" are so many triumphs and reproofs for the author. They are to him what the shouts and hisses of the gallery are to the dramatist; and, if he be wise, he will not hold them in supercilious contempt.

Again, when we find the phrase, "beautiful blue eyes," in George Eliot's "Mill on the Floss," underlined once as a whole, "eyes" twice, and "blue" thrice, we can follow and appreciate the train of thought and sensations that led to the marking, and see the flush thereby excited in the smooth cheeks of the reader. The words reproduced a mental portrait of someone known to the annotator, and were therefore irresistible.

The "people" are nothing if not impartial in their criticisms. They have but one standard—their feelings; and to this they are eternally faithful. Thus when we find George Meredith's "Rhoda Fleming" censured with "Turn it out!" "No good!" "Rot!" "A silly book!" and the like, we are bound to acknowledge that, by the standard of its judges, the book is justly condemned.

We will begin by considering Mrs. Oliphant's "Adam Graeme." We read the opening paragraph:

"The first thing which I can record concerning myself is that I was born——"

Then the word of comment "Wonderful," fills up the line, and extrudes itself into the margin. From the handwriting, we conjecture that our commentator is a lady, or, rather, not a gentleman. She has brought the three volumes home for amusement and instruction, and now, having had her tea, she sighs away the burden of care which has come upon her during the day, and prepares for relaxation.

"The first thing which I can record," and so on.

"Dear me! what a remarkable fact! Why, Mrs. Oliphant might as well tell us that the gentleman has two eyes, two

legs, two arms, and so on. Of course he was born, and why anyone should think it worth while to say so, I can't imagine."

The mood satirical awakens the baby power of criticism in the reader's mind, and, feeling for her inch of pencil, she writes, in delicate, incisive characters—"Wonderful!" Then, with her mind relieved, she proceeds to the next paragraph:

"That I was born! I, who now sit in this remote and solitary study, of whose mysteries my good neighbours speak reverently with doubt and wonder, encompassed with things immortal; the everlasting elements without, the stream, the hills, the fruitful earth, which has been and shall be until the end of time; within, with things of life, fated perchance to live longer than this present world, the books of men—the Book of God—that out of darkness, and sleep, and unconsciousness, I was born!"

This is a poetical idealisation of Adam Graeme, the hero of the tale, sitting in his study, surrounded by articles which, though matter for reverent doubt and wonder with those who knew not what they were, were nothing more than a number of books, a pair of globes, a few stuffed animals, and sundry pictures and relics, such as a museum would scarcely say a civil "thank you" for; surrounded immediately by such transitory things, but also, more mediately, by those more permanent creations of Nature—hills, rivers, and, in short, the earth we live upon; and lastly, himself in turn surrounding, or rather containing the knowledge obtained from books, and the Book of books! A picture of concentric circles—the earth, the study, the hero, the soul of the hero!

"Good gracious!" here says our Mary Jane, in a pet of impatience, "what a to-do about nothing!"

But as she cannot spare time to re-read the paragraph to make sure that it means nothing, she merely marks it with the lead. Then, being again eased of the task put upon her by her exacting intellect, again she turns to the book. To her joy—oh foolish, impatient Mary Jane! yet, oh wise and prescient Mary Jane!—she finds that her critical faculty has not deceived her. For she reads as follows:

"These are wonderful words. This life, to which neither time nor eternity can bring diminution—this everlasting living soul, began. My mind loses itself in these depths. Strangely significant and solemn

are the commonest phrases of our humanity. . . ."

"Just my own thought!" says self-appreciatory Mary Jane, with a jealous flout at the authoress for filching from her the credit as originator of a good criticism. "The sort of book I could have written myself, I can see!"

And then she reads on and on, rendering unwitting homage to Mrs. Oliphant's skill as a romancer.

Yet stay! Our Mary Jane is impelled to carp once more.

"I felt," says Mrs. Oliphant, "large drops of moisture burst upon my brow; I shuddered through my whole frame; I felt an irresistible inclination to flee away, and escape from all these miseries for ever."

Mary Jane puts her pencil through "flee," and metamorphoses the rhetoric into plain matter-of-fact by substituting the word "go." Dear Mary Jane, your endeavour is commendable. You have a natural abhorrence of fine writing. You yourself are not in the habit of enduring distempered moments, when reason is dethroned within you; therefore, you cannot believe in such spiritual exultation as is the outcome of a peculiar combination of circumstances and temperament. "'Flee' away," indeed! Fudge! If he must take himself off—though the need is not apparent—let him simply shake himself together, open the door, and saunter, with his hands in his pockets, wherever his whim may lead him. As for fleeing! why, men and women never "flee." Ghosts and goblins may; but who shall vouch for even them in these days of disbelief in spiritualism?

Mary Jane, you err. Mrs. Oliphant is right, strange as it may appear. You are, in fact, twice wrong: wrong in altering what is not wrong, and wrong—even if you had been right in this—in not putting your pencil through the next verb in the sentence, and giving us a word to harmonise with the sober "go" of your choice. "Go away and escape from," is short leg and long leg. We should as soon think of saying that you, Mary Jane, were beaten black and brown—Heaven avert the contingency! No; if you must be critical, be consistently so. Don't let your vexed mind merely dabble in the mistakes of the writers who come under the ken of your terrible intellect; but remove your shift of mercy or negligence, and plunge earnestly, "sans everything," into the invigorating task

that seems put upon you. But there, don't be discouraged; don't fret. We do not blame you. Do but accept our admonitions in the spirit in which we offer them to you.

Our next subject comes from Goldsmith's comedy, "She Stoops to Conquer." We are attracted by the last criticism in the volume. Mr. Hardcastle says: "O Lud! O Lud!" etc. in explanation of which our popular commentator adds in the margin: "Lud—corruption of Lord! therefore swearing."

The handwriting is round, the letters are pot-bellied; and under the annotation is a thumb-mark which, by the aid of our science and second sight, we pronounce to have been wrought by a lad of fifteen or sixteen. We will call him Erasmus Meditation. Your business, Erasmus, is that of eighth assistant in the two-windowed shop of Mr. Peter Tomkins, draper and mercer, in Alexandra Square. Your tastes are literary, but circumstances, as usual, militate against your inclinations; and, whereas in your mind you aspire to be among the great or learned of this world, in your body—your actual self—you are that most infinitesimal and undignified of mortals—a counter-jumper.

"'She Stoops to Conquer!' Wonder what it is about," said our Erasmus to himself one evening when, having tidily put away all the cottons, and buttons, and tapes, and gloves, which he had disturbed in the course of the day, and having washed some of the hateful aroma of his business from off his hands and face, and shaken his features into staid solemnity before the glass in the common room of the establishment, he cast his eye down the catalogue of the Free Library.

"'Stoops to Conquer!' a fine title—in-spiriting, you know. Makes a fellow feel that he has in his bones some ambition to be something he is not. Could fancy myself Field-Marshal Meditation, or Archbishop Erasmus, with the greatest ease in the world. Yes. I will have 'She Stoops to Conquer,' and see what it is like. 'He stretches himself to win,' or 'He rises on his toes to reach,' would be more the thing for a man like me; but one must cut one's desires to one's opportunities, Erasmus, my boy, and one must put up with what our writing men and women provide for us, withal one has the feeling within one, that one could beat them all out and out in the matter of writing books, if only one did but try!"

"Yes, please, No. 9999 — Goldsmith Oliver, I think. No, is it? Yes, Oliver is the Christian name. He's called Goldsmith, though of course it might have been his trade, and not a name of his own at all. Ah! I see—it's a play."

Exit Erasmus Meditation, making much noise as to his feet, book under his arm, happy in the consciousness of coming pleasure.

"Yes, mamma, my toes are cramped. It's standing all day long behind that blessed counter. I've got a new book."

"Something instructive and devotional, Erasmus, my boy, I hope."

"Oh yes, mother. It's about stooping to conquer."

"Ay di me! We must all do it, my dear lad. We must bend our backs to the burden of life, bear the yoke without flinching, and then, when the last day comes, we shall be thankful. Yes, truly thankful. Read it to yourself, child. I am stimulated enough already."

"All right, mamma," from Erasmus, who secretly congratulates himself on the permission, since reading aloud to his mother is an ordeal like hot coals at the feet, with icebergs on the hands. Then, setting deep in his chair, he takes the prettiest of the kittens upon his lap, prepares his pencil, and opens the book No. 9999. His impression of the first page is unrecorded. He restrains his pencil for a whole page in Act I. But when Mr. Hardcastle says: "Add twenty to twenty, and make money of that—" And Mr. Hardcastle replies: "Let me see; twenty added to twenty makes just fifty-and-seven—" he were more than brute, and less than himself if he held his hand.

"Twenty and twenty are forty, not fifty-seven," he writes in the margin; and who shall contradict him?

But, once started, Erasmus knows not when or where to stop. He alters Mr. Hardcastle's "quotha" into "quoth he"! He charges Mrs. Hardcastle with using the word "paltry" in a wrong sense. He translates "solus" as "only." He agrees with Miss Hardcastle in her detestation of "a reserved lover," and explains, in a footnote, that "a reserved man is a man which . . . no, a man who reserves a part of himself within himself, and is a sham!!" Nevertheless—O illogical Erasmus!—he underlines, with two thick, black marks, Mr. Hardcastle's responsive assertion that "modesty seldom resides in a breast that is not enriched with nobler virtues," to

which he further affixes the seal of his entire approval in a "very true."

He is charmed with Tony's famous song in the "Three Pigeons," and underscores the first two lines:

Let schoolmasters puzzle their brain  
With grammar, and nonsense, and learning,

with such strength of finger that we should have prophesied a bad end for him if he had carried his approval to the next line also, which he passes over in silence for the fourth, wherein the tempting word "genus," in italics, gives him opportunity of stating, as an aside, that "genus, generis" means a race. The "toroddle, toroddle, toroll," at the end of each verse is a killing mystery, if the quivering zigzag underneath it means anything.

But really, Erasmus, you are so exacting and devoid of imagination that we know not what to think of you. When you put three notes of interrogation opposite "ecod" we wonder what you mean. When you scrawl two perpendicular dashes alongside Tony's description of his half-sister as "a tall, trapesing, trolloping, talkative maypole," and of himself as "a pretty, well-bred, agreeable youth that everybody is fond of," we sympathise with you, and recognise your ideal.

Later, we draw conclusions that your modest mind, Erasmus, is satiated with the "devils" and "sounds" of the speakers. You are surprised at the need of such strong language. No wonder! You laugh, too, as you think how they would have sounded coming from you in slow, but honest, recitation to the ears of horror-stricken mamma.

And thus, when you come to Mr. Hardcastle's "O Lud! O Lud!" you make your final remark, and retire from the field of commentary. Our poor Erasmus! Hadst lost all patience with thy author, and his ill-sounding incomprehensibilities? Didst at length come to regard him as a reprobate on whom good black-lead pencil was wasted? Or, wert thou suddenly called away from the completion of thy instructive pleasure by some domestic necessity? or—woe to it!—some fell circumstance or accident that put a period to thy life? Hadst thou a fit when thy curious mind had writ itself out in the last exhaustive paraphrase? The cat—did it, perchance, go mad, and, biting thy mamma and thee, send ye both to an untimely grave? Was supper ready, and didst thou haply overeat thyself; or choke? Heaven save us, Erasmus! Would that



thou hadst ended the task undertaken in the spring of the evening, and not by this sullen close to thy young outpourings have left us in a turmoil of agitation for thy physical and intellectual security! But if thou art still among us, may thine end be peace.

Swearing! Yes, Erasmus, we would fain believe that this one word solves the riddle of our hopes and fears concerning thee. Thy mind, having lightly jumped the dangerous ditches of "devil" and "zounds," comes full tilt upon a "Lud," and, with poetic prevision, thou knowest the peril with which thou art threatened.

"Shut the book, for evil communications corrupt good manners"—thus speaks the conscience of Erasmus, and he, being but a boy, dare not disobey its loud authoritative counsel.

"Very well," sighs Erasmus, "but before I put it away, let me express my opinion once again."

"Lud! Lud! Corruption of Lord—swearing." This done, he shuts the book with a bang, awaking mamma to the presence of supper, and the realities of a life which she was fast forgetting in the sweet confusion of naps and knitting.

Heaven be with thee, Erasmus, and keep thee always innocent—even by the rules of thine own exacting standard!

One more subject. In another novel—the title of which we are glad to forget—there occurs the phrase: "A sweet, fresh, young man," to which nauseous mass of adjectives upon one small noun, is affixed a feminine "Oh my!" That it is a feminine addition, who can doubt? Can you not hear her say it? see the expression on her face while she says it? fancy the flickering giggle upon her lips while she writes it in the book?

The words in print have a strange power over her. "A sweet, fresh, young man!" Why, may our head be forfeit if she felt not each adjective to the end of her toes, and a shock that might have been the superlative degree of the three adjectives together, when she came to the crowning word—man!

Ah, Miss Susceptible Sensitive, we know you. We would we could say we love you. But, candidly, we cannot. That "oh my!" of yours is such a plebeian, a basement, sort of exclamation, that we could not idealise you to the loving point, howsoever much we tried. True, we are willing to allow that ours is the misfortune.

You may be as pretty as a Greuze. We hope you are. But if you value your peace of mind in the future, Miss Susceptible, do strive, and strive early, to master your tongue. Don't, for the sake of all you hold dear, let it do as it pleases. Or, if you find that it is, thus early, too fatally independent to submit to discipline, lock yourself in a dark room for five hours or so a day, and give the tongue full fling, so that, on your release, it may be too tired to let loose any more such monstrosities of speech from pure exuberance of health and imagination.

A word in your ear, Miss Susceptible. Do you know that if, captivated by the sweetness or the beauty of your face, we had engaged ourself to you for life, and were on the very eve of joining you in church some bright June morning; if, at such a conjuncture, we were to hear you utter such a pair of words, we do declare and vow that we would cry off, and take our chance of an action for breach, so immense is our horror of such terrible slips of the tongue!

Heaven help us! We seem to see and hear a table full of cherubic little Susceptibles—our off-spring, Susceptible, born ere we had knowledge of your one evil quality—we seem to see them in all the charms of innocence and grace; we distinguish ourself at one end of the table, and thee, O Susceptible, at the other, when lo! an evil spirit appears, a black shadow has fallen upon us; we are penetrated with woe; we seem grim and anguished, as through fear and disgust. Now, wherefore this sad change? why so sudden a transformation? Alas! it is due to this, and this only. The tiny seed of vulgarity admitted into the brain of their mamma at some horrible moment, has brought forth its fruit.

The maternal "oh, my!" has descended to a young generation. Thine own odious words, O Susceptible, have found expression in thy posterity, and ours. "Oh my! oh my!" Mercy, we cry; and lo! the vision has passed.

There are in life rare, but certain, moments of bitterness and horror so intense that a repetition of them is death. Read, therefore, and ponder our words, Susceptible, and, if you love our esteem and that of all your respectable acquaintances, for the future forswear "oh my!"

Our picture gallery were an endless one, did we humour ourself. But we prefer

not to extend the pleasure of a brief chat with our subjects until, by lingering over the scrawled and well-thumbed books, we be attacked by distaste and nausea, and disposed by our altered mood to be hypercritical rather than tender and just towards these, the lowly, but not contemptible, critics of our writers.

### A FAMOUS POTTERY.

TIME out of mind there have been potters at Lambeth. At first, perhaps, they were attracted to the place by some vein of clay which was suitable for their craft. But if such a vein ever existed, it has long ago been worked out.

For the Dutch potters, who settled in Lambeth early in the eighteenth century, the advantages of the site were its loneliness and almost waste condition, sparsely inhabited with people inured to the fumes of potters' kilns, with its nearness to the city, and its facilities in the way of water-carriage. The Dutchmen made Delft ware as well as salt-glazed stoneware. The manufacture of Delft ware gradually dwindled away, and the products of Lambeth became more and more utilitarian and unartistic as time went on.

The earliest of what we may term modern potters' firms, actually existing or represented by direct successors, were the Stiffs, who established a pottery, in 1751, on the site of the old residence of the Bishops of Hereford.

In 1769, according to Nichols, "a burnt artificial stone factory" was established by Mrs. Coode, at Lambeth. The burnt stone was a kind of terra-cotta, in which the Coodes at a later period produced works of artistic merit, such as bassi relievi, of which there is an example at Greenwich Hospital, and statues such as that of Nelson upon the Nelson monument at Great Yarmouth.

The Pottery to which we propose to pay a visit, that of Doulton and Co., was founded in 1815, by John Doulton and J. Watts, at Vauxhall Walk, and was removed to its present site—of which it then occupied but a small corner—in 1834, to the High Street, Lambeth, that is, which was once known as Back Lane; the river in those days being considered the chief highway of Lambeth, when the cry was "first oars to Lambeth," instead of calling a cab from the stand, or taking a place in railway or tram.

Stoneware was from the beginning the chief product of the Lambeth pottery, and was of chiefly a utilitarian character—chemical vessels and household requisites, with stone bottles and jugs. In these last-named vessels some attempt was made at artistic decoration. The "old brown jug," of Toby Tossopot character, was indigenous to Lambeth, and other jugs and bottles were produced bearing the portraits of well-known characters of their times—Wellington, the Sailor Prince, and heroes of the Reform Bill agitation. The solid success attained by the firm in its stoneware pipes and vessels of strictly useful purposes, gave the opportunity for developement in another direction. The production of terra-cotta for architectural embellishments, as well as for vases of various kinds, gave an artistic direction to the efforts of the Lambeth potters. Some of the first results of this may be seen by any passenger by the South Western Railway between Waterloo and Vauxhall, where one of the monumental factories of the firm will be noticed decorated with medallion heads in terra-cotta, representing the great potters of the past, and, ideally, the cities and states where the art has most especially flourished. This building dates from the year 1866, and from that time date the earnest efforts in the direction of artistic workmanship and design, which first came under general observation at the International Exhibition of 1871, and from that time the Lambeth pottery has borne a conspicuous share in what may be called the Renaissance of English pottery.

In one respect this Renaissance forms a new departure altogether. Hitherto the craft had been mostly confined to masculine hands. We all know what Madame Palissy thought of her husband's experiments in enamelled ware, how she cried ruin and havoc as her household goods gradually disappeared to feed her husband's furnaces. And in our old Staffordshire potteries the rôle of women was to fill the crates, and load the donkey, and drive the same to market. And the artists of the famous English potteries of the eighteenth century were all of the rougher sex. We read of "a nursery" at Chelsea of about thirty lads, who were learning the arts of "potting and painting."

But it was reserved for our own age to exploit the deftness and lightness of touch of feminine hands in the service of artistic decoration. And in this connection, with reference to ornamental pottery, we may

quote an account of the Doulton Potteries published by the firm.

"The year 1873 was, perhaps, the most eventful in determining the future of this interesting manufacture. Its first days saw the definite introduction of female employment as the mainstay of the decorative work, while the later months brought about the commencement of an entirely new branch, such as had never before found footing in Lambeth, namely, the under-glaze painting of Faience. Mr. W. T. Rix, who took special interest in organising the ladies' and girls' department, has since had the superintendence of the art pottery work. During the year a small band of young girls had been carefully trained in the handicraft of stoneware decoration, while some twelve or fourteen lady artists were industriously instructed in Faience painting work."

With this much introduction to the subject, we may begin our visit to the Doulton Potteries: first taking a glance at the objects of pure utility—drain-pipes, conduits, sinks, and sanitary ware of all kinds, many of which are moulded by machinery and turned out in quantities quite astonishing. Other matters there are in which ornament is combined with utility, as in stoneware grates, and hearths, and chimney-pieces, sometimes plain and severe, and sometimes highly decorated with plaques, figures, and medallions. Then there are fittings for lavatories, bath-rooms, and other household purposes; for this clean and brilliant stoneware can be moulded into almost any form, and seems destined to supersede metal castings and fittings, as well as stone and marble ornaments, in the filling up and decoration of houses, clubs, manufactories, and other buildings.

But these things are chiefly of technical interest, and wonder is more strongly excited when we come in view of the amazing variety of decorated pottery, with all its richness and sumptuousness of form and colouring, wonder as to the processes and methods of the art by which all these charming effects are produced.

The artistic branches of the Doulton Potteries are housed in a large building apart from the general works; a building of many floors with many corridors and passages, with lifts shut in and working without noise; there are telephones on every floor, and electric bells tinkle softly now and then; but generally a pleasant stillness reigns throughout the place. Each

one of these doors bears on a white plaque a lady's name—the lady at the head of the studio. And when the door opens, a long well-lighted room is revealed with tables sprinkled with tools, and brushes, and palettes, and sitting or standing, a number of girls, each endued with the ample white apron of her craft, and each at work upon some vase or other work of art, placed opposite on its revolving pedestal—a vase still soft from the potter's wheel. Some of the processes of decoration are more or less mechanical, a richly decorated surface is produced by pressing fragments of fine old point lace upon the moistened clay, dies or seals charged with various-coloured clays are impressed upon the vase, coloured slips moulded in perforated plates of metal are used as ornaments, or designs are transferred to the clay by a kind of stencilling process. Or perhaps gold is applied with a stamp, or a line is incised here and there, and filled up with colour.

But all these processes require a firmness and delicacy of touch, an assured and a skilful handling which is the result both of training and of natural aptitude. All these processes go, perhaps, to make a vase of which many exemplars will be produced, and which will be, with all its richness of ornament, within the reach of people of moderate means.

But there are other and smaller studios, occupied, perhaps, by two or three artists only, where work is going on which is destined to be unique. Here, on the moist clay, a young lady is, with rapid touches, designing some trailing plant, or some flower of graceful form and brilliant colouring; while another, with pointed tool, is incising the outlines of some flowing ornament, or perhaps it is a landscape centre-piece which is growing under the brush of the rapid and skilful artist.

One of the pleasantest studios in the building is that occupied by a lady who has long been distinguished by her skill in designing and modelling animal forms, and whose etched outlines of horses, cattle, and animals in general, have given individual value to so much of the original "Doulton ware." Here we see a charming little group of white and black-faced sheep, protected by the swelling curves of a quaintly-shaped vase, while on the other side is an equally delightful sheep-dog, with "his honest, sonsie, bousn't face"—a vase whose future possessor is to be envied for his good fortune.

But, whatever may have been the character of the vessel of clay, whether vase or centre-piece, panel or plaque, to one complexion must it come at last—the kiln, that is, or firing process; and of the regions where all this is carried on we obtain an unexpected glimpse.

At the end of a long corridor we come to an iron panel, and this, suddenly thrown up, reveals a vast, indefinite space beyond, penetrated with a greyish glow that is rather gloom than light, with groups of men in rough working-dress scattered about, and a clayey feeling everywhere, while, rising from basement to roof, are what seem to be huge rude pillars of white calcined bricks, which are actually so many kilns awaiting their weekly charge.

This is the after-world of the creations of the potter's art—or, rather, it is the scene of their fiery trial, from which they will return endowed with a species of immortality. Indeed, there is nothing perhaps, among all man's works, so indestructible as well-baked pottery.

Ages hence, when the site of Lambeth, or perhaps even of London, shall have become unknown, some of these vases may survive, treasured in the museums of a future race, to whom there may be little other evidence of our ever having existed.

When the cavern of the fiery furnaces is once more shut out from view, we may return to the happier regions of the ateliers and studios. There are some fifty of these in the building, affording space for about four hundred workers. Then there is a spacious dining-room, with long tables laid out in readiness for the midday meal. Here the young ladies will presently dine together; and we may imagine that the earnest stillness of the studio will be succeeded by a good deal of talk, laughter, and general rattle.

There is a refreshment bar, too, where those who prefer a lighter repast may obtain anything they require. In the evening tea is served, and from this meal those who choose can join the evening classes at the School of Art. For there is an excellent School of Art in Lambeth, which furnishes from among its students many recruits to the work-rooms of the Lambeth potteries. There is also a lecture-room, where papers are read treating of the ceramic arts; and a museum of pottery—small, but wide and complete in its range; and a small reference library, embracing the most costly and elaborate illustrated works on

the subject of ancient and modern pottery.

While the ornamentation of pottery is almost entirely done by female hands—in the plastic arts the masculine element re-asserts itself. And here we come to studios devoted to works in terra-cotta, in which of late years wonderful progress has been made, owing in great measure to the efforts of the Lambeth artists and workmen.

The Doulton Potteries began to produce works in terra-cotta as early as the year 1855, chiefly in the way of garden vases, pedestals, garden seats, and the like. Then followed the manufacture of architectural decorations in terra-cotta, and the production of plaques and medallions. The generally received idea of terra-cotta is that it must necessarily be of that deep reddish-brown colour, and, indeed, "terra-cotta" figures as something of the kind in the dressmaker's list of colours, as applied to female costumes. But terra-cotta may be also of a light-buff colour, or of any shade between; and these lighter shades of the material lend themselves very effectively to those works of more elevated purpose, in which the human form is modelled in high relief, or even to groups of figures, which may more properly be described as statuary.

The most distinguished worker in this branch of art is Mr. George Tinworth, whose works, all produced at the Doulton Pottery, are now well known through the length and breadth of the land.

It is a privilege, as well as a pleasure of a high order, to be introduced to Mr. Tinworth's studio at the pottery, where he may be found enveloped in his long, white workman's blouse. A sturdy, unpretending figure, with aquiline profile, and face well shrouded with brown beard and moustache, and with the nervous, plastic hands of a born sculptor. Here he stands, surrounded with his works in various states of progress, from the earliest sketch to the completed and recently-fired group. Mr. Tinworth's subjects are, as is well known, chiefly of a religious character, and drawn from Biblical incidents. He has recently completed a monumental work, of which the subject is, "Christ before Herod," the figures life-size, and the whole marked with the verve and dramatic power characteristic of the artist.

It may be questioned whether any real artist has himself much satisfaction in his own choice works. He always doubts



whether he has thoroughly realised his own conceptions; he remembers, too, the labour and sorrow they cost him before they were produced to the world. And thus we fancy that it is with something like a sigh of relief that the artist turns from his higher works and brings to light a delightful little work in terra-cotta, no bigger than a pint pot, which is a representation of a Punch-and-Judy show, in which artistes and spectators are so many mice, while one little gamin, in the way of a mouse, is trying to peer behind, or rather within, the scenes, to see how the whole thing is done. And now we can quite realise that George Tinworth is of the same race as William Hogarth and George Cruickshank, and has a strong sense of humour underlying his other gifts.

Higher still we mount, and find gentleman artists at work painting figures on panels, which are presently to go to the oven: or otherwise occupied with brush and pallet. Others are modelling in clay the details of a grand fountain that is going to Glasgow presently. The separate parts, of which the fountain will eventually be built up, are of a size to astonish one. Here is an elaborate portion just completed, which is far too big for any of the ordinary lifts, and a group of men are busy about it, and are making ready to lower it down in primitive fashion, with ropes and pulleys, through a huge trap-door. It is an anxious moment when the load swings clear, for it is all built up, with its elaborate curves and mouldings, of soft clay. At the last moment, a workman whips off his cap and applies it to a part where a rope threatens to fret the mould. There is a kind of self-sacrifice about the act that suggests the mediæval workman, anxious, above all things, for the success of his work. Indeed, a good deal of that mediæval spirit seems to pervade the whole establishment.

And now we must leave the pleasant region of art to wander into that undiscovered region of which we had a glimpse just now—the region of dim distances encompassed by furnaces and kilns. At the very outset, however, we are brought into the throwers' shed, and within the scope of the fascinations of the potter's wheel. There is no such wonderful sight anywhere to be seen as the growth of a lump of clay on the potter's wheel, under the hand of the potter, into shapes of grace and delicacy, such as no other craft can rival. And when, as in this case, the

potter is one of the most skilful of his craft, the beautiful forms that rise under his hand seem like the result of a magic power. And in one "tour de force"—where the potter, by a turn of his finger, spreads out the lip of the vase into a circle of overlapping leaves—the result is more surprising than if it had been effected by a fairy wand.

Then there is the lathe room, where the still unbaked vase is placed in a lathe, and its surface receives a high polish, or where circular lines are run round it.

Further on, rougher work is in progress—the moulding of clay into vessels and appliances of commerce—and then we are introduced to the kilns themselves. These are now described as cool; but the air within them is of tropical sultriness; great cylindrical chambers, one above the other, communicating by a domed opening in the centre, and these chambers are being rapidly packed with objects of every possible shape and size. Rows of vases repose in their niches as if in some sepulchral chamber; stacks of pipes and slabs occupy the centre; the great section of the fountain we saw lowered down just now is already reposing safely in the kiln.

The chamber below will be white heat, this one only red heat, explains our guide; and so the great oven is filled up, and by-and-by the batch will be complete and the kiln built up, and the great furnace will roar, and then the whole contents will pass by degrees from perishable clay to the brightness, and strength, and purity of true pottery.

## CURLY'S LAST RIDE.

THERE were rocks ahead—there was no doubt of that. For weeks we had heard whispers of an Indian rising, and now the Redskins had us hemmed in on every side. The white settlers had long ago left the territory, and we were holding the fort in utter desperation. Dear old fort, what happy days we had spent in it! How brave and bright the hearts that beat there! It was picturesquely rough. The winding river could be seen a mile away, gliding and quivering through the trees like a huge serpent. The air was laden with the scent of the pine bloom, and the prairie round was soft as velvet. The high stockade that ran round the barracks made the position all but impregnable, and we kept the old flag floating over it to the last.

But the day came when we had to leave it, flying for our lives. We were only a handful of men from the beginning. The Captain had been murdered by the red devils three weeks before, when parleying with one of the Chiefs, and Bruce, his orderly, galloped back with an arrow in his lungs, and died two days after. Scottie and Ford succumbed to typhoid fever and were buried behind the stables, and only six of the boys were left, besides myself, to see the end of it.

I was in charge after the Captain's death, and when I saw them drag his mutilated body past the fort, I felt sorely tempted to trust to luck and make one good old-fashioned charge at the dusky scoundrels. But I had great responsibility upon my shoulders then, and as I was only a non-commissioned officer, I did not care to be too rash, or to fool away my comrades' lives unnecessarily. A prairie trooper is not just the most refined character going; he does not move much in polished society, nor does he see many new faces; but he loves his comrades all the more for that, and I knew that there was not a man amongst us that would not die for the other if it came to a pinch.

So we kept on our weary watch, waiting for the help that was never to come.

Dear old chums, how brave and patient they were! If I had been a general they could not have obeyed me better. I wonder if an odder squad of men were ever shaken together? Here was old Peter, the veteran, always talking of the "precarious times," but as game as a pebble in spite of his frosted head; and Frenchy, so called from the long goatee he insisted upon sporting as often as he could find an officer good-natured enough to tolerate it; there was the Parson, nicknamed on account of his never-ceasing profanity, but who was as tender-hearted as a woman; Ananias, always telling the most impossible yarns, and invariably ending with the solemn asseveration, "this is a true story"; Fatty, ever on the look-out for a meal; and, last of all, there was dear old handsome Curly—every one who knew him loved him. His voice was the loudest and his laugh the merriest everywhere. His heart was as big as a house, and he always had a smile and a kindly word for every poor wretch that ever needed one. He was a reckless dog, and oftener in scrapes than any man in the command; he received his reprimands and punishments in due course, and when they were over was again

as bad as ever. The men adored him, and the officers thought nothing that was done was good enough or bad enough unless Curly had a hand in it too. How he used to laugh when an Indian came within range, and how incessantly he used to pop at him "just for fun"!

It was all hard enough work while it lasted, though we never knew from one moment to another when the enemy might storm us, and the horses were kept saddled day and night in case of a surprise.

We had to keep our eyes skinned, you can bet on that. The Indians were round us not a hundred yards away, and seemed to divine how scarce our provisions and ammunition were.

For a week or two we had peppered them gaily; but it soon became too expensive an amusement, and we had to husband every cartridge we could count against the day when might mean men's lives. Right up to the hills behind, right on to the river in front, they lay in wait for us; and the curling smoke from their teepee fires told us in what swarms they mustered.

Escape seemed quite impossible. The stores were all but finished, and half-rations was the order of the day for man and beast. The horses had the worst of it, I think; deprived of exercise, and stinted of their food, their legs began to swell, and the want of water made their coats rough and staring, and their tempers vicious and uncertain.

Things went on like this for more than a month, and, at last, we had not more than three days' provisions left amongst us. The well had dried up completely, too, owing to the awful drought, and the men were beginning to be wild and desperate.

I had just dropped asleep one morning after a long night watch, when Frenchy woke me to say that a fresh detachment of Indians had crossed the river on a raft which was moored close to the horses' old watering-ground. This he had distinctly seen from the look-out tower on the old hospital roof, and he further added the alarming information that the new-comers had their "feathers" on, and were dancing to the beat of the tom-tom.

This was as bad as could be, for the feathered heads and muffled beating betokened speedy bloodshed. I was up in a moment, and every loophole in the corral was stopped as fast as willing hands could do it. The horses were led into the square, and the little squad armed to the teeth, gathered together, prepared

to defend their lives as only desperate men know how to do.

We had not long to wait. We saw the mob in front of us grow larger, and heard the guttural yells that greeted the Big Chief's speech, and then they came towards us in a solid mass. Forty yards away they stopped, and, forming a circle round the barracks, fired volley after volley at us, but their bullets stuck harmlessly in the palisades, or flew high above our heads.

Occasionally they would fire arrows in the air to which were attached burning rags, with the evident intention of setting fire to our buildings.

For many hours this went on, the Redskins knowing that they had us completely trapped, whilst we dared not waste our ammunition by the discharge of a single shot. At last they succeeded in firing the stables, and the old wood burned like tinder.

Fatty and Frenchy got up to the roof at once to try and save the place, but hardly had they shown themselves when there was a deafening gun-fire, and Fatty fell dead at our feet, shot through the head.

We were determined that the Indians should not get his body to mutilate and disfigure, so we laid it in the thickest of the roaring fire to burn. There was no time then for leave-taking, nor signs of sorrow, and what we had to do had to be done quickly.

From the stables, the fire spread to the hospital, and we were getting scorched with the awful heat, while the horses were becoming unmanageable through fright and excitement.

The moment had come for action and could not be delayed. "Boys," I said, as I looked into the faces of the little group about me, "we've stuck to this old outfit long enough. We haven't another meal to eat, nor a drop of water for the horses, and the place is on fire all round us. We needn't expect any mercy from these howling devils, and I'm not for asking it either. But we must get away from here mighty quickly that's certain, so I propose to make a dash for the river and the raft; if we can reach it safely we may save our skins, and if not, we may as well be killed out there as burned like rats in here." To this there was a general assent, and that is how the sortie was arranged.

It takes a long time to tell, doesn't it? But it wasn't long of happening, I can tell you.

The horses' girths were overhauled and

tightened, and each man slung his rifle on his back. Revolvers in right hand, and sabres in left, we prepared to mount, with the understanding that we were to keep together pace for pace, straight out into the open for half-a-mile, and then strike to the left for the river.

One moment for a silent, rapid hand-shake, and we were all in the saddle but Curly, who stood at the gates to open them. I held his horse and saw him jump into his place, almost before the rusty hinges had ceased to creak.

The Indians saw our movement and headed for us immediately; but we were too quick for them and charged smash into them, riding down the nearest and shooting and sabring right and left.

How distinctly I remember in the next few seconds the crimson blood, the thunder of the horses' hoofs, the moans and cries, and the deep laboured breathing as the heavy sabres rose and fell.

The firing, unfortunately, was a signal to the Indians near the river-bank that we were moving, and we could see the gleam of their rifle-barrels as they ran towards us. There must have been three hundred of them round about us, and we were only six. I don't know how the other fellows felt, but all my nerves seemed strung like wires as we galloped along. Here was a sense of glorious, mad intoxication, that overcame all other feeling.

How the horses ran, half-plunging, half in air, and how the lead hail whizzed on every side of us! We got well into the open, and "left wheel" I shouted, and then we were making straight for the river.

A rattling volley from a little thicket we were nearing passed right amongst us, and I saw Curly's right arm fall limp and helpless by his side. The bright cheeks blenched, but he never uttered a sound, and I saw him let his pistol fall and put his sword between his teeth as he tore along.

The Parson was swearing at the top of his voice, and slashing like a butcher as he stood high in his stirrups, and we went on neck and neck, like a rolling wave. We were within half-a-mile of the water now, and the spurs were jamming hard and fast.

Oh, if we could only make it!

Another volley, and Curly fell forward on his saddle, but was up again in a moment, ghastly white, and with the blood pouring in torrents from his mouth. He staggered, and swayed, but shook his brave head and smiled, as if to say he was with us still.

"Hold on, Curly!" I cried. "Sit steady, man—for Heaven's sake, sit steady! we are almost there."

In another moment we were at the raft, Ananias was cutting at the ropes, and I had Curly in my arms, whilst the others covered us against the yelling mob now fast overtaking us. The horses fled madly off as soon as we dismounted, and we could see the braves pursuing them already far away.

The rest is quickly told. We got afloat, and dropped smartly down the stream, lying flat on our faces to lessen the danger of being hit by the shots the enemy kept dropping at us.

For hours they followed us down the bank; and every now and then, when the river narrowed, and brought us too close to them, we would give them a dose, dropping the nearest, and scattering the rest. But when the evening came, and the sun went down, we saw the last of them, and knew that we were safe.

Not a man was hurt but Curly. Why was it that he alone—the bravest and the best—should have been singled out for such a death? His arm was shattered, and a bullet had gone in at his back between the shoulders. He was in agony, and we had not a comfort to offer him. We laid our tunics on the rough log-knots, to make it softer for him, and the Parson pulled his shirt and socks off to make a pillow for him. Frenchy tore his shirt into strips for bandages, and old Peter used his to cover up the poor cold feet.

Yes, Curly was dying. He groaned with pain, but he never complained; and, although he could hardly speak, he smiled at us to thank us for what we tried to do for him. There were few words spoken as we drifted on, and, when the great moon rose in a blaze of silver light, she looked down on one hard sight that night: a little log raft dancing on the water, and on it six weary men, blood-stained, half-naked, dust-begrimed, and one of them with glazing eyes fast travelling to the farther shore from which no man returns.

Just before midnight Curly spoke.

"Good-bye," he said; and the boys knelt round him in a group, and took his hands. The tears were trickling down their faces, who would themselves have died without a tremble. "I'm going, boys; good-bye." And then he put his hand up to his neck and showed the little chain he always wore, and which we used to call his dog-collar. "Give it to her by-and-by,"

he whispered. "Dear little Jeanie," and then he fell back exhausted. He was so white and still we thought him dead; but soon he spoke again. "How dark it is! Well done, Parson. Jeanie, come back to me! Steady there. Dear little woman!"

And Curly's life went out for ever.

When the stars gave way to the rose tints of the early dawn, we landed in a little pine-wood. With swords and hands we dug a grave and placed him tenderly in it, kissing his dead cold face. The Parson's shirt was still his pillow, and Peter's red tunic his winding sheet. His sword, and rifle, and spurs were laid beside him; and dear old Curly was left alone.

Who Jeanie was, we never knew; but the heart that loved her was as true as steel.

Did you ever care for him, oh well-loved Jeanie? or was he less than nothing to you? Are you hoping still to hear his laugh and feel his strong arms round you? or have you long since ceased to think of him?

No monument is standing to tell his worth, no prayer was chanted over his mossy grave; but the pine-trees wave all round it, and the song-birds sing above it; and Curly—dear old Curly the lion-hearted, the best and truest of men—sleeps in it alone the sleep that knows no waking.

#### WEST AFRICAN "CUSTOMS."

ROME was in her death-struggle with Hannibal, whose brother, Hasdrubal, had brought a new army across the Alps, and was marching southward. Should he reach the Tiber, there would be no hope for the Eternal City. What were the gods about? To jog their memories, they were all cleaned, newly dressed, laid on ornamented couches (pulvinaria), and solemnly carried round; their temples, meanwhile, being purified of the smoke and other filth which was sure to gather wherever burnt sacrifices were frequent.

But this and a host of other little ceremonies were felt to be not enough; the present crisis in Rome called for something more. A few generations earlier the Consuls would probably have drawn lots to see which was doomed by the infernal gods, and he on whom the lot fell would have drawn his mantle over his head, spurred his horse upon the Carthaginian lines, and, dying, have dragged to death



along with himself the forces of the enemy. Now Consul Nero, instead of sacrificing himself, showed himself such a master of tactics that he annihilated Hasdrubal's army at the Metaurus, Hannibal's first news of the defeat being his brother's head, which the conqueror bowled into his tent. But though the educated Romans were, by that time, some way gone in scepticism, the people were as superstitious as ever; and, while the fate of Rome hung in the balance, the Senate went back to the "great customs" of early days, and solemnly buried alive in the forum a Gallic man and woman, and a Greek man and woman.

No doubt hundreds of Romans thought that the grand success at the Metaurus was due not to Nero's ability, but to this satisfaction offered to the grim powers of darkness. It was a "survival," of which the more enlightened were ashamed; for the Romans had passed beyond the stage of human sacrifices. They had even taken upon themselves to admonish others. One of the terms of the treaty at the end of the first Carthaginian war was: "You shall no more pass your children through the fire to Melcarth (Moloch of Carthage)";\* but fear is an ill-counsellor; and now the old dread of blood-loving powers in the background of everyday belief was cropping up among "among the masses." "Oh, but our Teutonic forefathers never did these dreadful things. They came natural to Greeks and Romans, who, half-Canaanites, were steeped in all the abominations for which the Lord destroyed those nations. We are pure-blood Teutons and Scandinavians, quite uncontaminated by those disgusting brutes, the Britons, than whom a more despicable set of savages never disgraced the earth."

That is what a good many fools, exaggerating Mr. Freeman's paradox, are ready to cry out. It is the sort of cry we may expect from those who swallow Mr. Hodget's "Greater England;" but is it true? Why, Tacitus—who held a brief for the Germans, glorifying them by way of contrast with his countrymen, going in for "the noble savage," as Rousseau did eighteen centuries later, and for much the same reasons—Tacitus tells of human sacrifices among "our Teutonic forefathers." Even the shrine of the great Earth-goddess in the sacred isle of Rugen was blood-

stained, and the temple servants who cleansed her car after the yearly festival were drowned that they might tell no tales. In our own isles, whenever—as in Sligo and Glamorgan—a cairn has been opened, and grouped round the chief have been found skeletons of his servants killed at his funeral, the grave is probably that of some Norseman.

"The Celt" had his faults; we must not believe Cæsar; the latest, and probably the true view of the Commentaries is that the manners and customs parts are as truthful as the natural history—the elks with jointless legs, etc.—and that both were made up from traders' tales.

But even Cæsar never accuses Gauls or Britons of killing wives or slaves at a Chief's grave. He does say that the former burned, in times of public danger, huge wicker idols full of human beings; and I can remember that, in my school history, the same thing was said of the Britons, and a picture showed the victims trying to wriggle out, and a Druid pushing them back with his staff.

But even if this is a true bill against the forefathers of three-fifths of us, they had passed beyond the other stage of marking a Chief's death by a "great custom;" while the Norsemen had not kept up the practice, indeed, long after every race in Europe, except themselves, had become Christians. There is a difference in the two usages: the former, however horrible, is done for patriotism; the latter is personal and selfish. It is in West Africa that the personal "customs" still survive in all their horror. With the destruction of the old Mexican Empire, the other kind of "custom"—the patriotic—has wholly passed away. Thousands were killed on those flat-topped pyramids, like that at Cholula; but it was for the nation's good, not to make the individual more comfortable in the after-world. Hundreds are killed at Coomassie, whenever any of the blood-royal dies, solely that the Prince or Princess may not want attendants.

Again and again an English trader or traveller has had to look on at these "customs;" but the horrors were never fully described till 1873, when the German missionaries, Bounat, Kühne, and Ramsayer were prisoners in the town at the time of the Crown Prince's death. As soon as he was seen to be dying, the executioners began to scour the streets for victims. When they caught anyone, two of them would come behind and each thrust a knife

\* Gelo, Prince of Syracuse, the Sicilian Greek, had tried to enforce the same thing long before.

through the cheeks, the blades passing over the tongue, and a handle sticking out on each side. This is to prevent the poor creature from "swearing on the life of the King,"—i.e., swearing that if he dies, the King must die too—in which case, instead of being killed, he would not only be spared, but ranked among the "okra," courtiers whose life depends on that of the King, and who—killed when he dies—hold till his death places of trust and honour.

Besides those thus caught, every great Chief had to offer a victim; but the number was chiefly made up of slaves and prisoners of war. The wives—painted white, and covered with gold ornaments—sat round the coffin, flapping off the flies. They were strangled at the funeral. So were six pages, who, similarly painted and adorned, sat by the dead man. They had known their fate some days before; but none ran away, save three wives of low birth, whose place was at once supplied by other girls. For nine days the slaughter went on, the people fasting, with shaven heads and bodies painted red, but drinking all the more. And this death-wake was to be repeated forty days after.

When a King dies, the victims are slain at the rate of two hundred a week for three months. But there have been "greater customs" than these. A King's mother died in 1816; her son slaughtered three thousand people, two thousand being prisoners just captured from the Fantis. To make up the tale, every big Ashantee town had to give one hundred, every smaller town ten victims.

A royal burial is on this wise: At the bottom of a huge grave are laid the heads of the slain; on them the coffin rests. Then, just before the earth is thrown in, one of the bystanders—a freeman, if of some rank so much the better—is suddenly clubbed, a gash made in the back of his neck, and he is rolled in upon the coffin. The idea is to send along with the crowd of slaves and prisoners someone who shall look after them as a ghostly "major domo."

For a King there remains yet another "custom." At the end of thirty moons the grave is opened, the royal bones fastened together with gold wire, and the skeleton placed in a long building divided into cells, the doorways to which are hung with silk curtains.

Then on his birthday the King of Ashantee goes early to the house of the royal dead. Every skeleton is taken from its richly ornamented coffin where it has lain sur-

rounded by the things that had been most pleasing to it in life, and is placed on a chair to welcome the visitor. As the King enters each cell with a meat and drink offering to the departed, the band plays the favourite melodies of that particular King, and, unawares, the royal visitor signs to the executioners who have followed him, and an attendant is pierced through the cheeks and killed, the King washing the skeleton in the warm blood. The same work goes on at the next cell, and so on, the fearful work going on far into the night. The band plays a signal as each victim is slaughtered. Two blasts of the horn mean "death, death;" three drum taps, "cut it off;" one beat from a big drum, "the head has fallen." The signal is taken up by other bands, and all through the city horn-blowing and drum-beating goes on unceasingly. The Ashantees always say of a drum, "it speaks;" and every traveller admits that they manage to elicit from that unmanageable instrument a most varied range of sound. The sounds form words, the whole rhythm a sentence, readily understood by native listeners. Each chief has his own "call," just as each Highland clan had its own battle-tune. Of course this constant killing makes the people callous to suffering and brutal to their prisoners. Their feeling in regard to death is not courage but apathy. The spectators are as delighted at these revolting "customs" as the Roman populace was at the gladiators' shows. Now and then a victim is tortured. The missionaries watched one who, besides the knives through his cheeks, had a couple of forks thrust into his back. He was then dragged before the King, gashed all over the body, his arms cut off, and in this plight compelled to dance for the amusement of the royal savage.

All the Ashantee human sacrifices, however, are not personal. When war is impending a victim is pegged down to the ground in the shape of an x, stakes being driven through the body, and the poor wretch being left to die on the war-path by which the invaders will have to travel. No native army would pass such an obstacle; it would turn back and cut a fresh way through the forest; and when, in 1874, we passed on unheeding over a body so pegged down along the road across the Adansi Hills, the priests came out and assured our men that they were doomed to certain destruction. If, after that Ashantee war, we had insisted

on the "customs" being given up, we should have only been doing our duty as human beings, not to say Christians. It is astonishing how the civilised world, which professes to have the welfare of the dark continent so much at heart, can allow this savagery to go on unchecked; and how we, who spend so much in capturing slavers on the East coast, most of whose cargoes are taken over to Bombay and become infinitely more wretched and degraded than they would have done as slaves to Turkish or Egyptian masters, can allow such abominations not very far off from Cape Coast Castle.

But everything in this world has a reason, and an Ashantee man could readily justify the "customs" by an appeal to that belief in the after life which he shares with us.

Is the Ashantee a fetish worshipper? That depends on what you mean by fetish. Major A. B. Ellis, who lived many years on the West Coast, holds that fetish worship—that is, the belief that a lump of red clay, or a bunch of rags, is in itself a deity—is unknown on the Gold Coast. Such a confusion of the tangible and the intangible, he thinks, is found in the South of Europe, where Italian fishermen will beat their images if their prayers are not answered, and Spaniards will cover theirs with a cloth when they are going to do something of which the saints might not approve.

But the Ashantee, he says, always distinguishes between the god and the object in which he temporarily resides. This may be a stone kept in a brass pan; but, when the god speaks to his worshippers he leaves the stone and enters into the priest, who shams convulsions, and begins to speak with a strange voice. Fetish, then, is the degradation—thinks Major Ellis—of a higher worship than that of the West African negroes; and the word, as he derives it, favours this idea. It is "feteiço," the Portuguese for amulet, used of rosaries, relics—what we call "charms"—the maker of such things being a "feteiçero."

When the Portuguese found the West Africans commonly reverencing stones, cones of earth, wooden dolls, they at once called these "feteiços," not noticing that it was the in-dwelling god, and not the tangible thing, that was the object of worship. The Ashantee believes that everything has a soul; when he offers a dish of rice to a god he is not troubled because his rice remains where he placed it; the soul of the

rice has been eaten, and that, for spiritual purposes, suffices.

Human beings have two souls; one, the shadow of the body, which, after death, goes to the world of shadows,\* there to live a life precisely like that which the man lived here; the other, a something corresponding exactly with the "genius" of the Romans, a guardian spirit needing—as the "genius" did—to be propitiated with sacrifice, and after the man's death either staying in the house where he died, to vex the inmates with sickness or misfortune, or else entering into another body. During life this "genius" (kra) generally wanders away at night; and dreams are the adventures which befall him.

Sometimes, when the man is thus left unguarded, the "genius" of one lately dead enters into him, causing sickness, and needing to be exorcised. These "kras" have a land of their own, "far beyond the river;" but they only go there when driven by the spells of the priests, preferring, when the bodies they tenanted are dead, to wander about to do mischief. In the hope of averting this, the Ashantee shaves the head of his dead, and hangs a bundle of the hair from the roof of a miniature hut. The hair attracts the dead man's "kra;" it enters and, once in, it is persuaded to stay by meat and drink offerings, thus freeing the real hut from its presence.

Now, the "genius" counts for nothing in the "great customs;" the King never thinks of the mischief he may do by letting loose on the world at once such a number of "kras." His only thought is to secure spirit wives, spirit servants, spirit courtiers for his departed relative. He kills on the same principle on which he puts meat and drink, pipes and tobacco, gold ornaments, cloth, etc., in the grave. All these things have souls, and it is the shadowy part which follows the man's soul to the land of shadows.

Our forefathers seem to have had a somewhat similar double belief, not indeed in soul and "kra," but in soul and ghost. We hold that the man's soul goes its way at death; but many still fancy that his ghost—answering to the "kra," turned, i.e., into a malignant genius—hangs about almost invariably to annoy or to terrify the survivors.

\* The after-world is a very poor, unsatisfactory counterpart of the world we live in. A proverb says, "A corner here is better than the whole of spirit land." So Achilles would rather be a day-labourer on Earth than a King in Hades.

On the part which dreams have played in furnishing us with ideas of the after-world, see Herbert Spencer's "Principles of Sociology," p. 148; they certainly account for "the unseen being conceived by most races as the counterpart of what we now see;" and, horrible though the "great customs" are, they are but the logical outcome of this belief. In shadowland, the Chief is still a Chief, and must be attended according to his quality. The same with the King: while living he is despot over tens of thousands; what more natural than that a few hundreds should be despatched along with him to give him due worship in the after-world, and enable him to maintain there the same state in which he revelled here?

I am afraid we shall not undertake a crusade against the "great customs." Knight-errantry, public or private, is at a discount, and such an expedition might send up the price of palm oil. Our hope is in the growing scepticism of the young.

Major Ellis witnessed, in 1884, at Cape Coast, a great function—"ordination," we should call it, of novices, dances of priests and priestesses, and their "possession," or inspiration, by the gods of whom they were respectively the ministers. To him, the pretence of inspiration was so palpable, the fraud so gross, that he was not astonished to see many of the young people sceptical, some openly laughing. Only the old men and women were smeared with white clay in honour of the gods, and now and then entered the circle and danced a few steps in the sacred chorus. He thought it a satire on our "civilising mission" that such performances could be looked on with reverence, even by the aged, in a town which had been in our hands for two hundred and fifty years. Shall we have to wait two hundred and fifty years more for the "growing scepticism of the young" to assert itself and put down the "great customs," as other like customs have been put down?

How long, I wonder, did the Japanese go on drowning a dozen youths and maidens yearly, in their chief river, to avoid floods and yet secure a good water supply, before they thought of substituting the clay images which are—or were till everything in Japan got Europeanised—solemnly flung in in lieu of the living victims?

Things move slowly; let us hope that they do move on the right lines even in the Dark Continent.

## RED TOWERS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Gerald," "Alexia," etc., etc.

### PART I.

#### CHAPTER XII. LA TOUR BLANCHE.

THROUGH the fields of France, past vineyard slopes bare and brown, past running streams, old white water-mills, rows of poplars whose few yellow leaves rustled softly against their slender grey stems, from one little wayside town, with its quaint old church, to another, with its stately old château, a Frenchman and his daughter were travelling down from Tours into the west.

The two were a curious contrast, and no one would have guessed at once that they were father and child. He was tall, broad, and fair; she, a girl of about fourteen, very small and childish-looking for her age, was extremely dark, with a fine, delicate little profile, large black eyes of velvet softness, with long curling lashes, and a quantity of jet-black hair, which made a natural frizz all over her head, and fell in a thick curly mane on her shoulders. She was dressed in a thick dark blue frock, with a picturesque sort of cloak caught up with ribbons, and a round hat on the back of her head, under which the bright little face changed its expression twenty times in a minute.

She and her father were alone in the railway-carriage, and were talking and laughing as fast as they could—she was talking, that is, and he was laughing at her jokes, and at the stories she was telling him about her friends at the convent she had just left.

"I do not quite know why grandmamma means to send me to a new convent, papa," she said, with a faint shadow on her face.

He looked troubled, too, for a moment.

"That you may be near her, petite, you understand. And near me, too, when I am in Paris—after all, though, the fault is not grandmamma's; it's mine."

"Ah, bad little papa! you don't know what it is to make all your friends over again, and your enemies, too. And they are sure to be horrid girls in Paris, who won't let me tease them. Ah, I shall have to be so very *comme-il-faut*, it breaks my heart to think of it."

"La, la! don't let us hear about broken hearts, and all those tragedies. There are



worse things to make over again than friends, or enemies either."

"Confessions, when one has done the same sins over and over again!" suggested the child, lifting her eyebrows with a solemn little air.

"Ah, yes, terrible," said her father, smiling faintly. "Well, Antoinette, your grandmamma and I have been obliged to talk things over seriously."

"That was a little terrible."

"Yes, more than a little. And she wanted you near her, which was quite right, and I wanted you, just at this moment, to go home with me for two days. So grandmamma wrote to the reverend Mother and arranged it, do you see? And your holidays this winter will be longer than usual, because I shall take you back to Paris with me. And listen: grandmamma thinks you will catch cold if you go with me to La Tour Blanche when all the leaves are falling. You must promise me to do nothing of the sort, or I leave you at Saint Bernard with Madame de Cernay."

"If you please, papa, don't do that," exclaimed Antoinette.

"Very well; but remember, if you go to Paris with a cough, grandmamma will never forgive me. The poor dear lady hates La Tour Blanche already, and what would she say then? She would take my little Netta away from me for ever."

"Oh no, papa, you and I will be very careful," said the child, slipping her hand into his arm. "We both love old Tour Blanche; we won't let grandmamma hate it any more. Do you know what I should like, little papa, if I could have my own way?"

"Something extravagant. A fine velvet frock, for instance, instead of this old blue thing."

"No—well, it is absolutely older than you think, though I do wear out my frocks faster than other people. But this is a beautiful plan. I said it at recreation the other day, when we all gave our ideas of happiness—to live alone with you at La Tour Blanche. The others laughed, but it was quite true. I can't think of anything happier. We should never be sad or dull, you and I; we understand each other so magnificently. We should amuse ourselves all day long, and never want to go to Paris. I don't care for Paris, myself."

Her father made no answer at once, but leaned back in his seat, pulling his fair moustache, and stared out of the opposite window.

"What, nobody but you and I? Not grandmamma?" he said.

"No, she would always be calling me in to take care of my complexion. Besides, she wouldn't come."

"And you would grow up a nice little savage. And have you forgotten that the place is half tumbling down, stained with damp, half furnished, except with dust, and rats, and ghosts?"

"Ah, mon Dieu!" murmured Antoinette; and she crossed herself, for the train was gliding past a cemetery on a hill, at the entrance of a little town. "I would rather live in it like that, than not at all," she said. "But we must restore it, like Monsieur de Cernay. I have heard you say that Saint Bernard was a funny old place years ago."

"So it was, petite: but M. de Cernay is a rich man, do you see? I am a poor man. But here we are: we must talk about these things another time."

After passing under the cemetery hill they crept a few hundred yards farther, between garden walls, till they reached the small station of Saint Bernard, and here they got out. The faces of the officials softened as they greeted Antoinette's father; he was evidently a popular man.

"Bon jour, Monsieur le Marquis. Pom-mard is outside there with the dog-cart," said one of them.

"Monsieur le Baron was here just now, asking for Monsieur," cried another. "Somebody told him the train had come in, and he went away."

"He is not far off. Call him back, somebody. Your baggage, Monsieur: allow me."

Even a few years ago, it was by no means common for a French gentleman in his own country to meet with all these signs of popularity. But this man was a hero among his own people, partly from the extraordinary sweet temper and good nature which saved some men of his kind in the great Revolution. They were proud of him, and somehow not envious, as he stood among them like a great fair Englishman, taller than any of them; and the English were popular in France then. Outside the station a shabby dog-cart was waiting, drawn by a rough-coated horse, which a young man in plain clothes was holding. If a Marquis's coronet had not been visible on cart and harness, the conveyance, from its looks, might have belonged to some farmer.

"We shall overtake M. de Cernay," said the Marquis, as he helped his daughter into

the front seat of the dog-cart. But before he had time to get in himself, a small, dark, ugly man came bustling back along the road, hot with haste, under the grey sky.

"My dear Montmirail! My dear Achille!" cried M. de Cernay, whose smile was most agreeable. "You are not going straight off to La Tour Blanche? Mademoiselle, how do you do? Charmed to see you; it is a privilege to see our neighbours again. But you must dine and sleep at our house, my dear Achille. My wife will never forgive me if I go back without you and Mademoiselle Antoinette."

"Thank you, my dear friend, but——"

"No excuses. We have a great deal to say to you. We have had letters that concern you. What do you say now?" M. de Cernay stopped, smiling more than ever, for some strange agitation showed itself in his friend's face.

"Look here," said the Marquis, laying his hand on De Cernay's shoulder. "Do me this kindness. Make my excuses to Madame de Cernay for this evening, and if you have nothing better to do to-morrow and will drive over to breakfast at La Tour Blanche, I shall be enchanted to see you. There we can talk things over, and you can tell me about—these letters. If Madame de Cernay will honour me and Antoinette by coming with you, though I hardly dare ask her to such an establishment——"

"She will, she will—charmed to renew her friendship with Mademoiselle Antoinette—who, upon my word, is more beautiful than ever," he added more confidentially, with a laughing glance at the child, who smiled at him brightly.

"Dear little Monsieur de Cernay!" she said, as she drove away with her father. "He is very good, but not very good-looking; what do you say?"

"I say there are not many good-looking people in the world."

"You need not complain; you see one whenever you look in the glass."

"Little flatterer, you expect me to believe you. And no doubt you believed M. de Cernay when he said you were beautiful."

"Ah no," she said a little sadly; "I am too black to be pretty; all the girls say so. That was only one of his kind speeches. Don't you think, papa, that women ought to be fair?"

"They say so. I don't know," he answered rather carelessly. Perhaps he was thinking of something else.

"Mamma was dark, to be sure," she

whispered to herself; and then M. de Montmirail whipped the horse impatiently. "You should have had him clipped, Pommard."

"M. le Marquis gave no orders," answered his man.

They drove through the low white out-skirts of the little town, and then for some distance along a high road, yellow and even, bordered by grass banks with stately grey poplars, large and old, growing in them at regular intervals. Between each five or six of these poplars was a square and tidy heap of stones for mending the road, arranged there by the "cantonniers," who do their work in this artistic fashion. The road ran on perfectly straight up and down hill, as far as one could see, but M. de Montmirail did not drive very far along it. He turned into a green grassy-sided lane, sheltered by bushes and willow-trees, near a clear, quiet stream, where a few small cows and goats were feeding, under the care of a group of wild-looking children. Then he turned up a hill, away from the stream, leaving on the left a picturesque old mill, and some thatched farm-buildings, standing among poplars.

The lane divided itself here, one branch running on by the stream and the trees, the other climbing to higher ground, and presently coming out on a bare upland, with brown ploughed fields stretching away on each side, bleak and lonely, and trees and roofs only to be seen in the distance.

But as they drove on, approaching the brow of a steepish hill, the road made a sudden turn down to the left, and a rich and pretty valley lay before them. In summer, it must have been a mass of greenery; now some of the trees were bare, but others were still clothed in brown and gold and lingering green, and with the red roofs of a village clustered and half-hidden amongst them, even under that grey November sky, the valley had a beauty of its own. Looking down from this point on the road, one saw the white church spire rising below among the varied roofs, and the little shady cemetery enclosed within its walls; and then came the picturesque confusion of trees, rows of poplars marking the stream as it ran through deep meadows and under the road; and then, on the opposite slope, the clustered trees broke above into bare slopes of vineyard facing the sun, and the top of the hill, higher than on this side of the valley, was covered with dark, gloomy-looking fir-woods.

But the chief feature of that slope was a large white building that rose among the thickest of the trees, its grey slated roof glimmering, looking down on the village in the hollow with an air of stately command and kind protection, as if the great Revolution, for instance, was a thing which had never really come to pass, or, at least, was not worth remembering.

"Dear old Tour Blanche!" exclaimed little Antoinette de Montmirail, as she came in sight of that wild old house among the trees. "I wish we were going to stay there always."

"Do you? Well, I partly agree with you," said her father. "I should like to live there most of the year, but that is impossible unless the house can be restored; and pray where is the money to come from?"

"Oh, I hate money," said Antoinette. "What happiness if it had never been invented!"

"I don't know, after all," said her father, as they drove down into the village street, "that it would be wise to spend so much money here. You see we have so little land here now. The wise thing would be, to sell it to some good man who has made a fortune by chocolate or caramels. What do you say to that? 'Monsieur et Madame Chocolat, et les petits Chocolat.' A grand day for the old Tour Blanche. They would fill it with splendid china, and Louis Quinze furniture, and Gobelins tapestry, and live there magnificently. What do you say? Shall we do it? Your grandmother would be enchanted."

"And two people's hearts would be broken."

"Whose, then?"

"Mine and M. de Cernay's."

"Ah, yes, you are right. M. de Cernay wants me to live here as much as you do. But he knows the difficulties better than you. In fact, I will tell you a secret." The cheerful Achilles bent down to his little daughter, and looked quite solemnly into her eyes. "There is only one way in which I can live here, and restore the château," he said close to her ear.

"Is there a way?" she said, gazing up with bright intelligence.

"Yes. Say no more now: here comes M. le Curé. Perhaps I will tell you more to-morrow."

It was necessary to stop and speak to M. le Curé, who smiled welcome all over his sturdy, brown face.

"You had my letter?" said the Marquis.

"Certainly, Monsieur, I was expecting it. At nine o'clock to-morrow, then."

"If you please. And you will stay to breakfast with us, Monsieur le Curé?"

"With pleasure, Monsieur."

There were plenty more greetings as they drove through the village: the inn-keeper, standing at his door under his sign of *Le Corbeau Blanc*; the bricklayer, the blacksmith, working at their trades in the street. The Marquis's hat was constantly off to these and others, and to the women carrying home loaves from the baker or returning wearily from their washing on the river-brink; all these looked up smilingly at the little demoiselle and her father.

"They all like you, papa," she said, when at last the bridge was crossed and they were driving up the wild, untidy, overgrown old avenue of the château.

"They would have much more reason to like M. Chocolat."

"Oh no," answered the girl quickly; "you know very well that the peasants never like the bourgeoisie."

"Where did you get all your knowledge of the world?" he said.

"Not at the convent, you imagine? Bah! one learns a good deal in life besides one's lessons," said Mdlle. Antoinette.

"No doubt; but it generally takes a little time, and you are already as wise as your grandmother. What a noise the dogs make!"

"Ah, dear old Ponto, and Fido, and Rataplan! What joy to run about with them again!" she cried; and she was ready to spring out of the dog-cart before it stopped.

"Patience, mademoiselle! a person of your knowledge——" her father remonstrated.

Out of the dimness of the avenue they came into a large court, covered with gravel, and rather weedy. Down the two sides of this court ran high white stone walls, their ruinous state half-hidden by the ivy that clustered over them, and the great chestnut and walnut trees that sheltered them. Each wall ended in a round turret, white, with a pointed grey roof, also half in ruins, and overgrown with ivy. Across the upper side of the square lay the house itself, mounted on a high terrace, and evidently, by the remains of old walls and foundations about it, much smaller now than it had been in former times. On the west side was the great tower that commanded the valley—white, square, and heavy, with windows here and

there. Below this, a long slated roof with a ridge of twisted iron-work ran along to another "pavillon" to the east, smaller, and more inhabited-looking. Then the line of building was broken by an archway with a tall iron gate, reached by a flight of steps, and opening into some sort of garden or "plaisance" behind the château. These steps led also to the door of the chapel, the ancient stones and low vaulting of which showed a greater age than that of the rest of the building. Behind the chapel, to the east, was the stable-yard, sheltered by great trees; and another high white archway led into the yard belonging to a range of farm-buildings; vast barns, with wine-cellar underneath them; cow-houses, pigsties, a duck-pond, more great walnut-trees stretching their boughs across a scene of more than Irish untidiness, with the low door and windows of the farmer's house opening on a grass grown, uneven causeway, raised a few inches above it all.

To the little Demoiselle de Montmirail this château was her beautiful old home, and she would hardly even confess that it wanted restoring. All the windows were unshuttered to-day, the doors stood open, and two old friends were waiting on the steps of the terrace. Antoinette jumped down at once into the arms of her old nurse, Suzanne, whose husband, the old valet de chambre, as disagreeable as he was clever and faithful, came forward with a stiff bow and a vinegar smile to receive his master.

"Come then, my child," said Suzanne, and with many loving and admiring remarks she took her little lady into the house, a small black-and-tan terrier dancing joyfully round them, while the dogs in the yard barked their loudest.

Suzanne was a handsome, fat, comfortable woman, with a smiling face and pleasant dark eyes. Everyone under her charge was in peace and in clover. She wore a nice white cap with flying strings, a thick blue linsey skirt, and a loose black jacket. She and Antoinette hurried together into the bare stone hall of the château, from which a broad, shallow staircase of stone led to the upper rooms.

The house was narrow in proportion to its length and height, like all the houses of its time, and the upper storey had originally consisted of large rooms opening one into the other throughout the length of the "corps de logis." The great tower was

divided from the rest of the house by the staircase, and its rooms had not been used for some years. They had been put in order and furnished for the young Marquise, Antoinette's mother, but she had died when her child was not more than two years old, and her husband, living there very little, had never used the tower rooms since. In his father's time, the great inconvenient rooms in the other part of the house had been partitioned and made into smaller ones, with a corridor running along behind them.

The universal brick floors of earlier days had also been changed for wooden ones; but all was now bare, and shabby, and dilapidated; and there certainly was nothing loveable or attractive in the stern old place, with its white walls two or three yards thick, to explain Antoinette's affection for it.

"Mademoiselle's own room is ready for her," said Suzanne, as her young mistress sprang upstairs before her.

And certainly there was something very cheerful in Mademoiselle's own room. Its high window looked out to the terrace, where all the dogs were now jumping round M. le Marquis; it was papered, ceiling and all, with bright pink stripes; the curtains and cover of the bed were also pink. There were gay rugs on the floor, the chimney-piece had a smart clock, and was also adorned with a variety of glass and china which Suzanne had collected at different fetes and offered to Mademoiselle; there were little pictures on the walls, more bright than beautiful, and by the bed hung a branch of box, now very dead, which had no doubt been blessed in church on Palm Sunday. There were a few old red velvet chairs, a little old chest of drawers, and an arrangement for "eau sucrée."

Suzanne had taken great pains to make this room what she thought her young lady's room ought to be. Behind the brass dogs on the hearth a bright wood fire was burning.

"Oh Suzanne, how pretty it all is!" said the child, and standing in the middle of the floor, she made two or three little jumps in the air. "If papa would only restore the house, and let us live here always! I think I have put it into his head, you know."

"Ah dame! that is good news indeed, mademoiselle," said Suzanne.